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Ellenor Fenn as “Mrs Teachwell” and “Mrs Lovechild”: a pioneer late eighteenth century children’s writer, educator and philanthropist¹

Ellenor Fenn was not well known outside her family and her immediate friends and neighbours for much of her lifetime, since everything she wrote was published anonymously or else under one of two pseudonyms: “Mrs Teachwell” and “Mrs Lovechild”. Yet the fifty or more small books for children and their mothers, for which she was responsible, together with about a dozen games and teaching schemes, were very popular in her day and went through many editions. Her identity gradually became more widely known towards the end of her life and especially after her death in 1813. Thereafter, several of her works continued to be popular with some titles remaining in print for fifty or more years. An analysis of her output shows that she had two distinct periods of publishing activity. The first of these was between February 1783 and late 1789, when she was published by John Marshall of Bow Lane in London. He was responsible for seventeen of her titles together with one elaborate teaching scheme, which were marketed by him as having been written by “Mrs Teachwell”. There followed a hiatus lasting until about 1796 during which she published little using local printers in Norwich and East Dereham in Norfolk. Between 1797 and 1813 she re-emerged as a prolific children’s author, during which period her works were published either by Elizabeth Newbery and her successor John Harris of St, Paul’s Church-Yard; or (after 1800) also by Darton and Harvey of Gracechurch Street London. During this latter period, Lady Fenn (as she then was) chose to publish her new titles under the pseudonym of “Mrs Lovechild”.

This paper will therefore seek to answer several questions including: how did Ellenor Fenn become involved in writing for children, what works were published by her as “Mrs Teachwell”, why did she largely cease publishing during the early 1790s, and what were the circumstances of her re-emergence as “Mrs Lovechild” towards the end of the decade? Before doing so, it is necessary to provide some biographical background to this little known, and until recently, largely forgotten author.

¹ I should like to thank the following institutions and organisations which have provided me with travel grants in order to consult Lady Fenn’s works: the University of California Los Angeles (Mitzi Myers fellowship), the Bibliographical Society (Barry Bloomfield award), the University of Wales Aberystwyth (Research Fund), Princeton University (Cotsen fellowship), and the Bibliographical Society of America. I should also like to thank Andrea Immel for her help and advice during my stay at Princeton and her comments on a draft of this paper.

BIOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND

Ellenor came from a family of landed gentry living about twelve miles north of the town of Stowmarket in Suffolk. She was born in the village of Westhorpe, 12 March 1744, the third child, and eldest daughter of Sheppard Frere, and his wife Susanna (nee Hatley) of London.² She was named after her father’s unmarried sister Ellenor Frere, who then lived with her father at nearby Thwaite Hall, and who appears to have been responsible for much of her niece’s education.³ Sheppard Frere and his family later moved to the nearby village of Bacton in Suffolk, where Ellenor spent her youth.⁴ She was described as a child “of strong original understanding and great accomplishment”;⁵ and was a talented artist, who particularly loved natural history subjects. She was also extremely well read.⁶

Ellenor’s eldest brother, John Frere studied at Cambridge University, from 1758 until 1763, becoming friends with John Fenn, a young man of moderate independent means from the Norfolk market town of East Dereham. Fenn was a sober, hardworking and utterly reliable, if rather priggish young man, who lived with his widowed mother. He became a frequent visitor to the Frere family home and according to his autobiography in July 1763 “paid his addresses” to Ellenor.⁷ These were welcomed, and in 1765, he purchased an imposing town house in East Dereham, overlooking the market place.⁸ The couple were married 1 January 1766, and settled down to the life of country gentry. They appear to have been happy together but were to remain childless. Two years after their marriage they became guardians of a ten-year old orphaned heiress named Mary Andrews, who lived with them until she came of age and married. They

² Norfolk Record Office, (N.R.O.) NNAS 5050/4/13 ‘Memoirs of the Life of John Fenn Esqr. M.A. F.A.S. &c. Including some short Notice of his Friends and Contemporaries’ 1782, f.10. The genealogy of the family is given in Burke’s *Landed gentry*.

³ See pages iv-v of the dedication to her aunt in *The female guardian*, (London, Marshall & Co.1784)

⁴ After her marriage the family moved again to Roydon Hall near Diss.

⁵ Gabrielle Festing, ‘A spinster and a Lady Bountiful of the eighteenth century’ in *Unstoried in history: portraits of some famous women of the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries*, (1901), 294-304, p. 294.

⁶ Her future husband later described her as having: surpassed most of her sex in literary knowledge; and with her pen expressed herself with an ease, elegance and correctness, equal to the best writers in the English language (NNAS 5050/4/13 f.10).

⁷ Fenn’s ‘Memoirs’ N.R.O. NNAS 5050/4/13 f.10.

⁸ The Fenn’s home, “Hill house” at East Dereham was extended and improved by them several times between 1766 and 1781 and remained their home throughout both of their lives. It survives, largely unaltered since their time and at the time of writing operates as guest house.

also frequently cared for their many nephews and nieces, ultimately adopting John Frere’s fourth son, William (born November 1775) when he was two and a half years old.⁹

Although they lived at Dereham, Ellenor and her husband often visited the area around Diss on the border between Norfolk and Suffolk, to visit her parents, who had moved to Roydon Hall in 1766, and her aunt Ellenor who was then living at the nearby village of Palgrave in Suffolk.¹⁰ John Fenn was also a close friend of a neighbour of her aunt, the famous antiquary “Honest Tom” Martin.¹¹ After Martin’s death in 1771 he would spend many days at Palgrave, helping the executors to catalogue his enormous collections of printed and manuscript books and historical artefacts and arrange to dispose of them in a series of auctions: it was at this time that John Fenn acquired the “Paston Letters”. Thomas Martin’s house at Palgrave was later acquired by a newly married couple, Rochemont and Anna Barbauld, who opened a school for boys there in July 1774.¹² There is no specific evidence that Ellenor ever met her aunt’s near neighbour, Anna Barbauld, but it is inconceivable that she did not do so, since the two women had so much in common. They were the same age, both educated and childless, and would soon afterwards adopt one of their nephews. They also shared an interest in the education of young children.

Ellenor’s interest in writing for children appears to have coincided with both the arrival of Anna Barbauld at Palgrave in the mid 1770s, and opportunities to look after her brothers’ growing family. She not only wrote, but also illustrated and bound, small books for her nieces and nephews. Her earliest recorded attempt, a collection of *Fables* was written in 1775 for her nephew George Frere, others were written for his brothers and sisters (including her adopted son, William, over the next few years. The idea of publishing them for a wider audience came later) and may have originated with the appearance (and subsequent success) of Anna Barbauld’s *Lessons for Children* in 1778. Shortly afterwards the publisher, John Marshall set

⁹ William later described “looking up to my uncle and aunt as parents”, William Frere, ‘Advertisement containing notices of the life of Sir John Fenn’, *Original letters written during the reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., Edward V., Richard III, and Henry VII.*, [ed. John Fenn], (1787-1823), vol. 5, ix.

¹⁰ For Ellenor’s relationship with her aunt see Festing, ‘A spinster and a Lady Bountiful of the eighteenth century’ 294-304. Unfortunately the correspondence providing the basis of this account is not publicly available.

¹¹ See David Stoker, ‘The ill-gotten library of ‘Honest’ Tom Martin’, in *Property of a gentleman: the formation, organisation, and dispersal of the private library 1620-1920*, edited by Robin Myers and Michael Harris (Winchester: St Paul’s Bibliographies, 1991), 90-111.

¹² See McCarthy, William, ‘The celebrated academy at Palgrave, a documentary history of Anna Letitia Barbauld’s school’ *The age of Johnson, a scholarly annual*, 8. (AMS Press, [199-?] p.279-392

up in business in Aldermary Court and began to specialise in producing books for children. Ellenor was interested in this idea, later explaining

A Rational woman, who is capable of expressing her ideas in tolerable language, might render an acceptable service to mothers, by supplying young people with a series of little volumes, tending to enforce the Duties of Childhood and early Youth. To write to children, between the age of three and fourteen years requires such moderate abilities, that I should not despair of success; at least the attempt could not subject me to disgrace, should I be discovered. These were my reflections a few months since, when I enquired of Marshall (the Children’s Printer) whether he would accept a manuscript and print it without expence to the unknown writer.¹³

Marshall accepted her offer and began a collaboration, which would ultimately provide him with several of his best selling titles throughout his career.

ELLENOR FENN IN THE GUISE OF MRS. TEACHWELL

Ellenor’s earliest published works were concerned with instilling morality, good behaviour and rational discourse; among young children by means of short plays involving them or correspondence supposedly written by them. She created the character of “Mrs. Teachwell” an essentially pragmatic, goal-oriented, at times over-moralistic governess who was yet kind and understanding to her charges, and could offer words of wisdom and experience to their mothers. Her first published work, *School occurrences: supposed to have arisen among a set of young ladies*,¹⁴ was written in November 1782 and appeared the following February, with a preface setting out her philosophy as a writer:

Those who are conversant with children, know, that they are more influenced by maxims which they chance to meet with in books, than by those that are inculcated by their parents. It ought not to be so. – But so it is. Since this is the case, we had better write for our children than preach to them.¹⁵

The work reflected its time and the literary prejudices of its author, aiming “to banish, from schools, novels, plays, and other injurious publications”.¹⁶ A thousand copies were printed in duodecimo format, sixty of which were given to the author in lieu of payment for her copyright.

¹³ *Fables, by Mrs. Teachwell*: (London: printed and sold by John Marshall and Co., [1783]), 76.

¹⁴ *School occurrences: supposed to have arisen among a set of young ladies, under the tuition of Mrs. Teachwell*; (London: printed and sold by John Marshall and Co., [1783]), English Short-title Catalogue (ESTC) T73111.

¹⁵ *School occurrences*, ix-x.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 76-7.

The work was an immediate success, with both adults and children and at least four editions had been published before 1800.¹⁷

School occurrences was immediately followed by a similar work to instil good manners in boys, dedicated to her adopted son William: *Master Meanwell’s rules* (which appears not to have survived).¹⁸ The author again set out her rationale for the work:

What mother does not wish her darling son to be “pleasing to all who know him?” – And who is not pleased with a well behaved child? From mothers, therefore, I hope for approbation; to them it is a pleasure to present my books, but to those who are not interested in the progress and conduct of such dear little ones, the volumes will appear contemptible, the writer ridiculous. .¹⁹

Juvenile correspondence; or, letters, suited to children, appeared in April 1783,²⁰ although it had been written for her nephews and nieces between 1779 and 1782. The author was once again rather dismissive of her efforts, describing them as “mere nursery prattle about dolls and toys; such as children themselves would write, could they express their own ideas”.²¹ Nevertheless, the work appealed to a young audience and second octavo edition was published by Marshall about 1792 and an 18mo by Abel Morse in New Haven Connecticut in 1795.²²

Later works for girls included *The female guardian* (1784) “designed to correct some of the foibles incident to girls and supply them with innocent amusement for their hours of leisure”, and *The juvenile Tatler, by a society of young ladies* (1789); five short dramas relating to child training and filial duty, in a series of compositions supposed to have been written by some of “Mrs. Teachwell’s” elder pupils. Both of these works enjoyed moderate success and were later

¹⁷ The so called “second edition” actually exists in two type settings of 112 and 140 pages respectively (ESTC N21605 and UCLA – CBC.PZ6.L94s 1784). The number of pages was further reduced to 108 in the “third edition” (ESTC T73111).

¹⁸ According to John Fenn’s ‘Autobiography’ this was a ‘Lilliputian quarto’, price 4d, and printed by F. Fisher of Rochester in February 1783. The work was apparently written in 1780 and dedicated to Master William Frere, and the author received about 60 copies for her Friends Fenn (NNAS 5050/4/13). It is not clear why this work was printed by Fisher rather than John Marshall, but it does appear later in Marshall’s *Complete catalogue of Mrs. Teachwell’s books*, published circa 1790, and so presumably he was either concerned in its publication or else reprinted it at some stage. It also appeared among the list of her books given in her obituary.

¹⁹ *Fables, by Mrs. Teachwell*, London, [1783]. 81.

²⁰ *Juvenile correspondence; or, letters, suited to children, from four to above ten years of age*. (London: printed and sold by John Marshall and Co, [1783]), ESTC T62605. It was dedicated Mrs. Frere (dated 16 July 1783) and presumably appeared during the autumn.

²¹ *Fables, by Mrs. Teachwell*, London, [1783]. 81.

²² ESTC T80859, and W201

reprinted. An equivalent and somewhat larger work, *School dialogues for boys*, published in volumes in 1784 was noticed in *The Critical Review*:

The scheme of conveying instruction, by means of conversation of boys, is in a great measure new. It is indeed inevitably attended with some prolixity and puerilities: but advice, in this form, is perhaps more commodiously insinuated than in any other, as it is conveyed to the young reader with an air of disinterestedness and impartiality. Boys will listen to the conversation of boys, and receive their decisions without prejudice of suspicion.²³

However, despite the publicity, this title did not enjoy the same success as her earlier works and was never reprinted.

Rational sports, in dialogues, passing among the children of a family,²⁴ (1783) was aimed at parents rather than children, “as a Hint to Mothers how they may inform the minds of their little people respecting the objects with which they are surrounded”. As she made clear in her preface: “I write for real mothers, not ladies who leave their offspring to imbibe the follies of the kitchen whilst they roam to places of diversion”.²⁵ This was another immediate success with at least five editions published by Marshall within the next decade and others at intervals until 1823.²⁶ A pirated edition was published in Dublin in 1794, and at least two editions appeared in the U.S.A. with the text adapted to suit North American readers.²⁷

Ellenor had written two collections of contemporary fables for her nephews and nieces which were published in July 1783. These shared the same fables, and the same attractive relief illustrating each of them, but were designed for children of different ages. *Fables by Mrs. Teachwell*,²⁸ was published in July 1783, described by her as “the humblest compositions that can be imagined; inculcating the fundamental duties of obedience and, deference to parents”.²⁹

²³ *Critical Review* 56 1783/4 p.479-80, and *Monthly Review* 70 1784, 80-1. ESTC T63967.

²⁴ *Rational sports. In dialogues passing among the children of a family. Designed as a hint to mothers how they may inform the minds of their little people*, (London: printed and sold by John Marshall and Co., [1783]). ESTC T131039.

²⁵ *Rational sports*, (London, 1783), xiii.

²⁶ ESTC T131043, T13044 T168282, and T168284. Marshall later assigned the copyright of the title to Baldwin Craddock and Joy who published an edition in 1823.

²⁷ *Rational sports. Fourth edition*. (Dublin: printed for Jackson, 1794).ESTC T168286. and editions by Cummings and Hilliard, Boston in 1814, and John Babcock & Son, New-Haven in 1820. For examples of the adapted text see pages 52-55 where different trees and their uses are being discussed.

²⁸ *Fables, by Mrs. Teachwell: in which the morals are drawn incidentally in various ways*. (London: printed and sold by John Marshall and Co., [1783]). ESTC T73094. Price 1s 6d. The small round illustrations may have been woodcuts, but it is more likely that they were cut in some soft metal and mounted on to wooden blocks.

²⁹ *Fables, by Mrs. Teachwell*, London, [1783]. 80.

Yet in an “Address to mothers” at the end she shows a growing confidence in her abilities by puffing her existing publications and announcing others that were forthcoming:

The mother who engages in the most “delightful task;” instructing her babe – will accept with cheerfulness “Mrs Teachwell’s” publications”.³⁰

Fables in monosyllables had been written in simple language for her adopted son William Frere in 1779 when he was three and a half years old. The work was also published in July 1783 printed in a larger type.³¹ Ellenor’s preface again displayed her increasing confidence in her abilities as an author, defending the use of fables in education, citing with approval some of the maxims of Rousseau, whilst at the same time deploring many of his philosophies. She also anticipated and attempted to forestall potential criticism:

I am prepared for ridicule should any but a tender mother open my volumes. I weave nets for insects; and if I suit my toils to my game am I to be derided?³²

Fables in monosyllables, usually came bound with another work with a separate title page, pagination and signatures: *Morals to a set of fables in dialogues between a mother and children*. This was intended both as a reading primer (where long words were broken up into component syllables (be-liev-ed etc.) and to draw moral lessons from the tales. The two works were usually sold together for two shillings, but were also available individually.

Fables by Mrs. Teachwell, was reprinted by John Marshall on at least one occasion around 1790,³³ and possibly again soon afterwards. A copy was also taken to the USA and copied in an edition published in Hallowell (Maine) in 1809.³⁴ *Fables in monosyllables* was reprinted a by Marshall at least twice within the next few years, progressively reducing the number of pages for the two parts from the original 176 to 120, and thence to 108.³⁵ Another Marshall edition was published after 1787, and in 1798 the work was published in Philadelphia by Thomas Dobson.³⁶ The work continued to be reprinted by Marshall after he moved to his new

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Fables in monosyllables by Mrs. Teachwell, to which are added Morals in dialogues between a mother and children*. (London: printed and sold by John Marshall, [1783]). ESTC N9627.

³² *Fables in monosyllables by Mrs. Teachwell; to which are added Morals, in dialogues, between a mother and children*. London, [1783], xi.

³³ ESTC N32467.

³⁴ *Fables, by “Mrs Teachwell”* (Hallowell [M.E.] Printed by N. Cheever, for Ezekiel Goodale, 1809).

³⁵ See ESTC T73095, N9627 and N31618. These are all dated by ESTC 1783, but may have been published 1783-1786. The third edition was imposed and saddle-stitched in a single gathering of 54 leaves, which allowed for a cheaper binding (see the note with ESTC N31618).

³⁶ ESTC N32467 and W12309.

premises at 140 Fleet Street in 1812, and once again in 1823 when he assigned his titles to Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, N. Hailes.³⁷

The metaphor of trapping small insects, used in the *Fables in monosyllables*, provided the title for her seventh and by far her most popular work, *Cobwebs to catch flies*.³⁸ This was published anonymously in the autumn of 1783 but always thereafter appearing in Marshall’s various “Catalogues of “Mrs Teachwell’s” works” which appeared in many of his publications. The two volumes of *Cobwebs* consisted of short lively scenes and dialogues written in simple language, printed in large type and illustrated by a series of relief cuts, which reflected the events taking place in the stories. The work was intended to be both instructive and amusing. The first volume was designed for children who were aged from three to five, and the second volume from five to eight. This work was originally intended to be a component part of an elaborate teaching scheme that Ellenor was then preparing for publication, but Marshall decided to publish it independently in advance, selling for one shilling each volume.³⁹ It quickly achieved a level of popularity as a primer, which would last for more than a century.⁴⁰ Marshall produced many editions keeping the title constantly in print until 1815, when he assigned it to Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy, although his name continued to appear on the title page until 1829.⁴¹ It was also printed in Dublin by John Rice in 1794, and another edition was advertised in Philadelphia by Johnson & Warner, in 1813 and 1814.⁴² During the nineteenth century it was reprinted by several other publishers in both Britain and the USA. John Marshall’s editions between 1783 and 1815 represent a nightmare for the analytical

³⁷ *Fables in monosyllables by Mrs. Teachwell*. (London: Printed and sold by John Marshall, c. 1812), and (London: Printed for Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy, N. Hailes and John Marshall, 1823).

³⁸ *Cobwebs to catch flies: or, dialogues in short sentences, adapted to children from the age of three to eight years. In two volumes.* ... (London: printed and sold by John Marshall and Co., [1783]). ESTC T73091.

³⁹ *The art of teaching in sport; designed as a prelude to a set of toys, for enabling ladies to instill the rudiments of spelling reading, grammar,* ... London, [1785], 14.

⁴⁰ See Charles Welsh, ‘A forgotten primer and its author’, *The Bibliographer*, I. (1902), 190-194.

⁴¹ Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy published new editions or impressions until 1841, latterly in association with N. Hailes. Thereafter it was published by Darton & Co (1842-1852) and the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (1844-60). United States editions appeared in Philadelphia by Johnson & Warner (1813-14), in New York by Mahlon Day (1834), and C. S. Francis & Co. (1851), and Boston by J.H Francis (1851). A *New cobwebs to catch little flies* was published by the Religious Tract Society, 1833-9.

⁴² ESTC N44101, and d'Alté Welch *A bibliography of American children's books printed prior to 1821*, (Worcester, [Mass.]: American Antiquarian Society, 1972), item 397).

bibliographer. The volumes exist in large numbers of variant undated states and issues, which defy classification into recognisable editions and impressions.⁴³

One of the undoubted attractions of *Cobwebs to catch flies* for children lay in the two frontispieces and the 26 elegant oval relief illustrations, which were presumably drawn by the author. Marshall’s blocks suffered through constant re-use due to the book’s popularity; some had to be re-cut, others were abandoned after they became worn out or otherwise unusable.⁴⁴ In some cases missing cuts were replaced by crude stock ornaments or woodcuts which bore little or no relationship to the text. Likewise, the ornate decorated borders originally surrounding each cut were discarded in later editions. Many of the original blocks were handed over by Marshall to the new printer, T.C. Hansard, when he assigned the title in 1815, but eventually the entire set had become so worn that it had to be replaced by a new set of oblong cuts in 1829.

During the late 1770s Ellenor had also been experimenting with the elementary education of William Frere using new teaching techniques.⁴⁵ In particular, she created a series of cards containing words, figures or images which could be combined together in different ways to teach basic grammar, spelling and arithmetic. Her publisher took an interest in her ideas. In one of the dialogues in *Cobwebs to catch flies*, entitled ‘The useful play’, two girls are using a similar and Marshall added a footnote:

Schemes to assist parents in teaching their children, by way of sport, are in the possession of *John Marshall and Co.* who intend executing them with all possible dispatch. Due notice will be given of their completion.⁴⁶

However it would be two years before Ellenor’s elaborate and very expensive *A set of toys*, was published⁴⁷ announced in an issue of *Cobwebs to catch flies* dating from c. 1785.⁴⁸ This

⁴³ For example, the order of the dialogues varies in early copies, as does the contents of the advertisements and notes from the publisher. The book was usually imposed as a duodecimo in sixes, but in some copies it is in twelves. Many copies were imposed to be sewn and bound in individual sections in the traditional manner, whereas copies from the same type settings might be re-imposed to create an issue with a single large gathering which might be saddle-stitched in a cheaper binding.

⁴⁴ For example ‘The Cat’ was re-cut without shading in background by 1794, and by 1815 had been lost as the cut for ‘The Dog’ used in its place. ‘The Spider’ also exists in two states before 1815 and ‘The Bird’ in three. Similarly, two of the three cuts used in ‘The fair’ had been lost by 1815.

⁴⁵ Ellenor’s previously unrecognised role as an innovative teacher was first discussed by Andrea Immel in ‘Mistress of Infantine Language’: Lady Ellenor Fenn, Her Set of Toys, and the Education of Each Moment’, *Children’s Literature*, 25 (1997), 215-228. Her role and motives as a teacher of grammar, and in encouraging mothers to teach their children are discussed by Carol Percy in “Disciplining women? Grammar, gender, and leisure in the works of Ellenor Fenn (1743-1813).” *Historiographia Linguistica* 33:1 (2006), 109-137, and Karen Cajka, *The forgotten women grammarians of eighteenth-century England (Ireland)*, University of Connecticut, PhD thesis, 2003), chapter 4. William Frere appears not to have suffered unduly as a result of these experiments with his primary education since he went on to have a distinguished legal career as a Serjeant-at-law and as the master of Downing College Cambridge.

⁴⁶ *Cobwebs to catch flies*, v.2 p.12.

teaching scheme incorporated 730 printed cards, stored in three wooden cigar boxes which together fitted neatly into a larger wooden box.⁴⁹ The two volumes of *Cobwebs to catch flies* were also supplied with each set, as originally intended.⁵⁰

Ellenor also wrote an instruction manual for use with her scheme, entitled, *The art of teaching in sport*,⁵¹ explaining how it was to be used and how it might be developed:

The Grammar Box may long retain its novelty, by a little art in the management. A fresh supply of cuts will renew that charm, which is so strong a recommendation to young people. A new set of verbs would tend to enliven the sport. It is almost impracticable to have a greater variety at one time in the box, as the number would be a real inconvenience.⁵²

⁴⁷ *A set of toys for enabling Ladies to instil the rudiments of spelling, reading, grammar, and arithmetic, under the idea of amusement,*

⁴⁸ The Schemes for playing in the above useful Manner being now completed, are sold by John Marshall by the Title of, A set of toys, for enabling Ladies to instil the Rudiments of Spelling, Reading, Grammar, and Arithmetic, under the Idea of Amusement.

The scheme is contained in one large Box, including three small Boxes, or Trays being divided into ten or twelve Compartments.

The Spelling Tray, Contains various Alphabets, enlivened with little Pictures on their Back; Spelling Tables; Reading Tables &c &c.

The Grammar Tray, contains a compendious Set of Grammar Lessons on Cards; the Parts of Speech tied up in little Packets, &c.

The Figure Tray, contains several arithmetical Table, Sums, Packets of Figures, great Variety of little Pictures of Birds, Beasts, Children’s Sports, &c. &c. &c.

The Prices are	£.	S.	d.
Spelling, Grammar and Figure Boxes, in one	1	1	0.
Grammar and Figure Boxes, in one	0	16	0.
Spelling Box only	0	10	6

Originally the Boxes, and the Book (under the Title of the Art of Teaching in Sport, containing Hints and Directions for the proper Management of the Schemes) were sold separately. – The Boxes are made stronger, more Prints are added, and the Book, bound in Red, is now included in each of the above Prices.

The Boxes are strongly and neatly made of the Tunbridge Manufacture; but are not intended to be in the Possession of the young People; yet, as Parts of the Contents may be soiled or lost, they may (by Application to the Publisher only) be had separately at the very moderate Prices subjoined to the List of Contents, given with each Box.

⁴⁹ The near complete *Set of Toys* in the Cotsen Library, Princeton has been described and illustrated by Andrea Immel ‘Mistress of Infantine Language’ and Jill Shefrin, “‘Make it a pleasure not a task’: Educational games for children in Georgian England”, *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 60 (1999) 251-275, pp. 264-5. Another example was auctioned at Christie’s in London in June 2006, Jim McCue ‘Learning through play the Georgian way’ *The Times* 5 June 2006.

⁵⁰ “The boxes are designed to supply lessons, suited to the gradual progress of little folk, and a book is provided, to furnish them with a farther variety, as soon as they are advanced to the dignity of reading in a book. It consists of dialogue, in sentences so short, that a child can read them with ease; formed of such words, as they already know at sight, on subjects with which they are familiar, and in which they are interested; they begin with lessons composed of monosyllables if three letters only, advancing gradually; they are printed in a good type, and enlivened with cuts; they have nothing more to recommend them; they are flimsy as their title but they are merely designed to catch flies”, *The art of teaching in sport*, 13-14.

⁵¹ *The art of teaching in sport: designed as a prelude to a set of toys, for enabling ladies to instill the rudiments of spelling reading, grammar, and arithmetic, under the idea of amusement*, (London: printed and sold by John Marshall and Co. [1785]).

⁵² *The art of teaching in sport*, 47.

It also set out her enlightened philosophy towards the teaching of difficult subjects:

Arithmetic is a very dull study to children; and if the rod and the slate hang side by side, it cannot fail to be a disagreeable one.⁵³

The art of teaching in sport was initially sold independently from *A set of toys*, for 9d, but copies were later included with the scheme. The book however continued to be advertised independently in Marshall’s catalogues, with new editions appearing in 1796 and 1804, which presumably corresponded with new editions of the teaching scheme.

The success of “Mrs Lovechild’s” teaching schemes’ encouraged Marshall to produce *A spelling book*, in 1787 “designed to render the acquisition of the rudiments of our native language easy and pleasant.”⁵⁴ This was another example of clever marketing, providing a series of spelling lessons to be used in conjunction with her existing titles and some others published by John Marshall.⁵⁵

To afford variety, *Marshall* has FABLES in MONOSYLLABLES which “Mrs Teachwell” does not recommend, because she wrote, because she thought they would be of use for the same purpose as the COBWEBS were designed.⁵⁶

A spelling book was also prefixed by “the child’s library; or, a catalogue of books, recommended to children from the age of three to twelve years” providing another opportunity of advertising her own works, although on this occasion she did list others including Mrs Trimmer’s *Spelling book*, and Mrs Barbauld’s *Lessons for children*. The work was also the first one to include a publisher’s advertisement for ‘A Complete Set of Mrs. Teachwell’s Works’, a practice he would frequently use thereafter. Thus “Mrs Teachwell” had become a valuable “brand name” for her publisher. The advertisement stated “The above Books may be had in various Bindings; or, if ordered uniformly bound in Sets” indicating that he was catering for as wide a range of potential customers as possible. Marshall appears not to have published a second edition of this work, preferring to concentrate on publishing Ellenor’s two grammars

⁵³ *Ibid.* 51.

⁵⁴ *A spelling book*, (London: J. Marshall and Co., [1787]). It was noticed in the *English Review*, XI. 1788, 152.

⁵⁵ ‘The Series of Little Volumes, to which the Spelling Lessons are designed as an introduction’, includes most of her own titles together with *The good child’s delight.*, *Short conversations*, *Familiar dialogues*, *The histories of more children than one.*, *Little stories for little folk*, and *The Histories of a great many little boys and girls*, “All adorned with cuts, and sold by J. Marshall And Co. No.4, Aldermay Church-Yard, in Bow-Lane, London”.

⁵⁶ Preface, xii.

and her Set of Toys, but a similar *Spelling book with easy reading lessons*, by “Mrs Lovechild” was later to be advertised by John Harris c. 1805.⁵⁷

“Mrs Teachwell’s” next group of publications display two further features of her later work – her belief that natural history should be an important component in the education of children, and her abilities as a compiler or adaptor of the works of others. The *Lilliputian spectacle de la nature* was probably published during 1786.⁵⁸ It was modelled on *Spectacle de la nature* by Abbé Noël Pluche, published in French between 1732 and 1750, and available in numerous English translations until the mid 1770s.⁵⁹ Ellenor again used the technique of teaching by means of reputed dialogues and letters between the children of a family.

Natural History appears to be a very proper study for young people, were it divested of such particulars as are not suited to them. Natural History, to be suited to Children, and peculiarly suited to Girls, must consist of Extracts. These little Tracts are composed of passages selected from a variety of Authors; with an attempt to connect those passages.⁶⁰

The work was published without author’s name or pseudonym, but was ascribed to “Mrs Teachwell” in Marshall’s catalogues. It was the only one of her works to be published in three volumes (covering insects, mammals and plants) and the only one to be published in the smaller octodecimo (18mo) format. The first of these volumes had been compiled for her nephews and nieces during the 1770s, and the second for the children of a friend. Only the third volume was written immediately prior to publication. This explains the note in an advertisement stating, “Had these volumes been written now, the arrangements of Insects should have been according

⁵⁷ *A spelling book with easy reading lessons, beginning with Words of three Letters, and proceeding gradually to as many Syllables*. By “Mrs Lovechild”, Price 1s 6d. published by John Harris, was advertised in *A new manual of devotions*, 28th edition 1805

⁵⁸ *Lilliputian Spectacle de la nature: or, nature delineated, in conversations and letters passing between the children of a family. In three volumes*, (London: printed and sold by John Marshall and Co., [1786]). *The English Short-title catalogue* suggests a speculative date of 1790 for the work, but the form publisher’s imprint using John Marshall & Co. without reference to his Queen Street premises was only used before 1787, and the work’s absence from early advertisements suggests a date after 1785.

⁵⁹ For example, Noël Antoine, Pluche, *Spectacle de la nature: or, nature display’d. Being discourses on such particulars of natural history as were thought most proper to excite the curiosity, and form the minds of youth*. (London, 1776).

⁶⁰ *Lilliputian Spectacle de la nature*, i.-ii.

to Yeates”.⁶¹ This does not appear to have been as successful as her other titles, perhaps because of the awkward format, or because it was not illustrated. No further editions are known.

Ellenor’s next attempt at teaching natural history to children, *The rational dame; or, hints towards supplying prattle for children*, (1786) was however copiously illustrated and went through numerous editions.⁶² The work shows the influence of Anna Barbauld, with a quotation from *Hymns in Prose for Children*, on the title page title page, and another note that “Mrs Barbauld has impressed the metamorphosis of the lepidopterous insects on the minds of little people by her sprightly-tale”.⁶³ It was noticed in the *Monthly Review* and *Critical Review*, in each case praising the work but criticising her use of technical language, such as “digitated animals, the larvae of gnats, the pupae of butterflies &c.”⁶⁴

A second printing was published by Marshall about 1788, which corrected an error in one of the illustrations and made minor corrections.⁶⁵ A so-called “second edition” with further amendments to the text by the author, but which took no notice of the complaints about the technical language, was published around 1790.⁶⁶ ‘Third’ and ‘fourth’ editions which include Marshall’s Queen Street address were published before 1798.⁶⁷ Marshall’s ‘fifth’ edition appeared around 1799, and a ‘6th’ in 1806.⁶⁸ Further (unnumbered) editions by Marshall

⁶¹ Ibid., ‘Advertisement’. The reference is to Thomas Pattinson Yeats, *Institutions of entomology : being a translation of Linnaeus's Ordines et genera insectorum; or, Systematic arrangement of insects*, (London, 1773).

⁶² *The rational dame; or, hints towards supplying prattle for children*, (London, Marshall and Co., [1786?]). ESTC T164781, which has the provisional date of 1785(?), but a copy at UCLA which contains the author’s annotations includes the date MDCCLXXXVI in her handwriting on the title page. The work contained ten full-page illustrative plates including a frontispiece showing a mother with two children surrounded by animals (marked *Dodd del. Royce sc.*) The plates are unsigned and may have been the work of the author. The remainder of the illustrations were divided up to illustrate between two and twenty six animals or insects (depending upon their sizes). An error on Plate VIII between Black Beetle and Darkling was corrected in the 2nd edition. Plate IV page containing images of a Dog, Cat, Fox, Wolf, Badger, and Seal exists in two quite different states, and is missing from some copies, and so appears to suffered damage or excessive wear before it was replaced.

⁶³ *The rational dame*,. The fourth edition. London, [1795?]. 85.

⁶⁴ *The Monthly Review* July 1787, p. 81. The notice in *The Critical Review* appeared in August 1787, p. 159.

⁶⁵ ESTC T46303 which has the date of [1790?]

⁶⁶ ESTC T206781.

⁶⁷ The third edition is ESTC T168244, but is clearly misdated at [1795?]. The 4th edition is T122971. A pirated version of the fourth edition was published in Dublin in 1795 by N. Kelly, for T. Jackson.

⁶⁸ ESTC N23617 and NSTC 2F3900.

appeared in 1812, and others thereafter by Baldwin, Cradock and Joy.⁶⁹ A New York edition appeared in 1821, adapted for a North American audience by the inclusion of animals such as skunks and gopher-rats.⁷⁰

Following the success of *The rational dame*, Marshall clearly wanted to produce further illustrated works of natural history for children. *A short history of quadrupeds, extracted from authors of credit*,⁷¹ was designed both as an introduction to the subject and as a pocket companion to visitors to the natural history exhibits of Leverian Museum.⁷² The work was published, without a compiler’s name, but was included in the final version of Marshall’s *Complete catalogue of “Mrs Teachwell’s” works*, (c.1790), and there is no question but that it was by Ellenor Fenn. The author appears not to have been able to correct the proofs of her work, since the copy in the Cotsen Collection contains an inordinate number of errata on a printed sheet at the end. The two volumes covered hoofed and digitated quadrupeds respectively, divided into sections and genera, and included 43 relief illustrations’. The first volume also contained a brief description of the Museum and the author’s ‘Reflections on the wisdom of God as it is discovered in the formation of animals’.

Ellenor was now in demand as a compiler and abridger of the works of others. *Select passages from various authors*, “designed to form the minds and manners of young persons; and at the same time to afford an agreeable miscellany for those of riper years”, was published, without any name of a compiler, in 1787: this time by W. Richardson of London.⁷³ However, it was also included in Marshall’s *Complete catalogue* circa 1790, so it may perhaps have been jointly published by the two publishers or even reprinted by Marshall. At 396 pages it was substantially longer than anything previously written by Ellenor or published by Marshall.

⁶⁹ 1816, 1820 and 1825. An edition was also advertised as “may be had” at Mrs Newbery’s in 1798, but this may refer to one of Marshall’s editions (see S. Roscoe *John Newbery and his successors, 1740-1814*, Five Owls press, 1973 J124).

⁷⁰ *The rational dame*; New-York: Samuel Wood & Sons, 1821. 12mo., 107p.

⁷¹ *A short history of quadrupeds. Extracted from authors of credit*, (London: Printed and sold by John Marshall, c.1790). 2 volumes, price 5s (not in ESTC but there is a copy in the Cotsen collection at Princeton).

⁷² This institution had recently re-opened as a public spectacle at The Rotunda, in Blackfriars Road Southwark, following the death of their collector in 1788.

⁷³ *Select passages from various authors. Designed to form the minds and manners of young persons; and at the same time to afford an agreeable miscellany for those of riper years*. (London: printed for W. Richardson, 1787). ESTC T145846.

Ellenor was also clearly dissatisfied with the volume, later describing it as

Well chosen but incorrect. A new edition of the same work is expected. The present Edition might be used as a trial of young persons.⁷⁴

A second Marshall edition is unknown, but a third edition, which advertised itself as ‘By the author of The short history of insects’, [i.e. “Mrs Lovechild”], was published after her death by William Tilley of Chelsea in 1821. John Harris, published another work with a similar title circa 1805, also by “Mrs Lovechild”; entitled *Select Passages, or Miscellany for Youth*, but no copies appear to have survived.⁷⁵

In 1789 Ellenor began to experiment with a new literary form venturing into the realms of children’s fiction, with the creation of a ‘moral fairy tale’, a genre then enjoying some popularity.⁷⁶ *The fairy spectator, or invisible monitor*, was described as having been written “by “Mrs Teachwell” and her family”.⁷⁷ However, the child in her story eventually discovers that the fairy she met is nothing more than a dream.

What Fenn certainly did do was confront head-on the concern that fairy tales encouraged susceptible children to believe in the supernatural, perhaps at the expense of their Christian faith, making them scared ever after, as Locke had put it, of “Shadows and Darkness”. This is why Fenn insisted in her preface that “no Fairy watches over you”. It was a common ploy on the part of moral fairy tale authors.⁷⁸

This is the work for which Ellenor is most often criticised; characterised by Samuel Pickering as an “anti-fairy tale”,⁷⁹ and described by Mary Jackson as “mean spirited”.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, it enjoyed a short-lived popularity. The first, undated, edition was noticed in the *Critical Review*

⁷⁴ *Some hints to young women, engaged in rearing infants, or educating children, either in private families, or schools*. (London: printed for E. Newbery, 1799), under ‘The Child’s Library’.

⁷⁵ Advertised in *A new manual of devotions*, 28th edition 1805, price 5s 0d.

⁷⁶ M. O. Grenby, ‘Tame fairies make good teachers: The popularity of early British fairy tales’, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 30 (2006), 1-24

⁷⁷ *The fairy spectator, or invisible monitor*, (London, 1789), price 1s 6d. A copy in the Opie collection, at the Bodleian Library, Oxford includes an inscription in the author’s handwriting to her nephew “Love attends dear Edward Frere from his affectionate friend The Fairy”.

⁷⁸ Grenby, ‘Tame fairies make good teachers’, 14.

⁷⁹ Samuel F. Pickering, *John Locke and children’s Books in eighteenth-century England*, (1981).66-7.

⁸⁰ Mary V. Jackson, *Engines of instruction, mischief and magic: children’s literature in England from its beginnings to 1839*, (Aldershot; 1989), 147.

in 1789 (and the following year in the *Monthly Review*)⁸¹. Shortly after publication Marshall reprinted the work, this time appending the year 1789 to the title page and that of April 23, 1789 to the dedication. He also published an entirely new edition in 1790. The second 1789 printing of *The fairy spectator* included an advertisement announcing the forthcoming publication of *The juvenile Tatler* which was the last new title to be associated with the name of “Mrs Teachwell”.

Thus there are eighteen titles which may safely be ascribed to “Mrs Teachwell” either on the basis of information given in the books themselves or on one of John Marshall’s advertisements. These works may be characterised as books for the children of the gentry or middle classes to read themselves, or to be read to them or used by their mothers. They were didactic and moralistic in tone and covered the subjects of reading and writing, basic mathematics, natural history, and one work of moralistic fiction. According to her obituary, Ellenor earned no payment from these works, the copyrights of which were assigned to her publisher; she merely received copies of her own publications to distribute to her friends and neighbours.⁸² (Other works published by John Marshall in the 1790s which may have been written by Ellenor Fenn, but were never listed as the works of “Mrs Teachwell” will be dealt with later.)

THE NORFOLK LADY BOUNTIFUL

After 1789 Mrs Fenn appears to have undergone an eight-year period of metamorphosis during the first five years of which she published nothing and afterwards comparatively little using minor printers and publishers closer to her home. She was to emerge from this fallow period in 1797/8 as the prolific children’s author “Mrs Lovechild”, who was ultimately responsible for about 28 books and 10 games and teaching schemes published during the last fifteen years of her life. The reasons for this may have originated in events that were taking place in her personal life, and in the area where she lived.

Firstly, after decades of relative obscurity as an antiquarian and local magistrate, John Fenn suddenly became famous in 1787 with the publication of the first volume of his *Original letters written during the reigns of Henry VI., Edward IV., Edward V., Richard III, and Henry VII.* The

⁸¹ *Critical Review*, 67 (1789), 360, and *Monthly Review* 3 ii (1790), 80-1.

⁸² *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, 88 (1813), pt. ii 508. John Fenn added a note of what she received in payment for the first six of her titles to be published (NNAS 5050/4/13). For example, in return for *Juvenile correspondence* she received 70 copies of the work together with a neatly bound set Johnson’s *Lives of the Poets*.

publication of the ‘Paston Letters’ was the literary sensation of the year, even attracting the attention of King George III. In May 1787 John Fenn presented the originals of those letters publishing in his first volume to the King George, and was awarded a knighthood, and his wife thereby became Lady Ellenor.⁸³ Sir John was also selected to serve as the Sheriff of Norfolk, for the years 1792/3, a singularly costly and time-consuming office, which he occupied at a difficult time. Trade was then being disrupted following the French Revolution and there was widespread local paranoia in southeast England about the possibility of an invasion. As sheriff, he was responsible for putting down at least one food riot by local men protesting at the inordinately high price of corn. The strain imposed on him during this period no doubt contributed to his sudden and unexpected death from a stroke in February 1794 leaving Lady Ellenor a wealthy widow, whose ward and adopted child had both grown up and left home.

Yet it would be unjust to ascribe the changes in Ellenor’s life solely to events that happened to her husband. Throughout the 1780s she became increasingly concerned about the growing rural poverty in Norfolk as the traditional textile industries in the county were being rapidly displaced by factories opening in the north of England. She was also influenced by Sarah Trimmer’s work in Brentford. In 1786 Ellenor helped to found one of the first Sunday Schools in the country, at East Dereham, and even taught one of the girls’ classes herself. For Christmas 1788 boys were “presented with hats and girls with bonnet caps and handkerchiefs, and some of them with books also”.⁸⁴ A small work, from this period, *Six lessons for youth, selected from different authors but chiefly from the Christian Scholar*, (1795) was printed by William Barker, a newly established printer of East Dereham. It was almost certainly the work of Lady Fenn, intended for her Sunday School, given its subject matter and the place of its publication, and was perhaps typical of one of the books given to pupils.

In the mid 1790s Lady Fenn became a keen supporter of Hannah More’s *Cheap Repository Tracts*, and sought to circulate them among poor children as a way of countering the many radical ideas and publications abroad.⁸⁵ After the death of her husband death she also sought to

⁸³ See David Stoker, “Fenn, Sir John (1739–1794),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9283> (accessed October 17, 2006).

⁸⁴ See the *Norwich Mercury* 30 December 1786 p.2 for a brief account of the school, in which “The girls are superintended by some of the most respectable of Dereham ladies”.

⁸⁵ B.S. Frere, *A record of the family of Frere of Suffolk and Norfolk* (Privately printed, 1982), 81-83.

establish and industrial school in the town for poor women and children, teaching them to spin flax in order to earn a living.⁸⁶ She later became a supporter of Andrew Bell and the National Society for the Education of the Poor in setting up ‘National Schools’.⁸⁷

Some of her experiences are recounted in the clearly autobiographical work *The village matron, or, anecdotes of Mrs. Lovechild*, which was the first work to carry her new pseudonym.⁸⁸ It was described as having been “compiled by “Mrs Lovechild”, for the amusement of her scholars” and printed in Norwich by Richard Bacon in 1795.

“Mrs Lovechild” lived in a village at a great distance from London. She had a large fortune and no family to provide for, she therefore made the Poor her family: she studied the best methods of doing good both to their bodies and souls. The children were particularly objects of her attention: she established schools for teaching them every necessary work of the hands, and herself taught them “*the one thing needful*,” “*what they should do to be saved*.”⁸⁹

There seems to have been a cooling of relations between Lady Fenn and John Marshall during the 1790s, coupled with her willingness to use other more local publishers, but she did not sever her ties entirely. The publication of *The village matron* was followed by another Marshall publication, clearly intended for distribution to her Sunday school, and specifically designed to bind with the earlier work. *A miscellany in prose and verse*, carried the running title of “‘Mrs Lovechild’s’ miscellanies’, and was another of her compilations.⁹⁰ Yet another work published by Marshall at this time *The footstep to Mrs. Trimmer’s Sacred history*,⁹¹ was listed among her

⁸⁶ Frere, p.83, and Festing, ‘A spinster and a Lady Bountiful of the eighteenth century’

⁸⁷ Fere, p.81.

⁸⁸ ‘Nurse Lovechild’ was the supposed author of a collection of nursery rhymes first published in the 1740s, and “‘Mrs Lovechild’” was the supposed author of a chapbook, *Mrs Lovechild’s Golden present*, first published in the 1760s. Neither of these works had any connection with Ellenor Fenn. Lady Lovechild appears as a character in *Cobwebs to catch flies*.

⁸⁹ *The village matron*, p.5. Andrea Immel has pointed out to me the similarities between the activities of Lady Ellenor in Norfolk and the fictional career of *Goody Two Shoes*, who became Lady Jones and devoted herself to the welfare and sustenance of her parish.

⁹⁰ *A miscellany in prose and verse, for young persons: designed particularly for the amusement of Sunday scholar*, (London: John Marshall, [1795]).

⁹¹ *The footstep to Mrs. Trimmer’s Sacred history: for the instruction and amusement of little children*. (London: Printed and sold by John Marshall, at No. 17, Queen-Street, and No. 4, Aldermay Church-Yard, in Bow Lane, 1797).

publications in Lady Ellenor’s obituary, but has never been otherwise associated to her (or indeed to anyone else). The work included a preface signed by ‘A.C.’

The writer of these pages thinks some apology due to Mrs. Trimmer, for making use of her name in the title to this publication. The high opinion she entertains of Mrs. Trimmer's Sacred history, made her wish to put it into the hands of her pupils; but finding it above the understanding of very young children; she has, in this, attempted to form a Footstep to lead them to Mrs. Trimmer's more improved work.

However, in the absence of further evidence, this work cannot be attributed to her with certainty.

Lady Ellenor did not devote all of her energies to the poor children of her locality, and in 1796 she produced a companion volume to her earlier *Short history of quadrupeds*, this time covering insects, which was once again designed as a pocket companion to visitors to the Leverian Museum, and beautifully illustrated.⁹² Rather than take risk of repeating the errors in the earlier volume, this was printed in Norwich by Stevenson and Matchett, but distributed in London by a group of fashionable publishers.

Marshall did however publish the earliest editions of what were subsequently to prove two of Lady Ellenor’s best selling works. *The child’s grammar* appeared around 1797, was one of the titles to be found in the earliest of John Marshall’s ‘Miniature Libraries’ which came in wooden cases to resemble book shelves, and may have been written specifically for that purpose.⁹³ However, it quickly became a successful title in its own right, warranting several editions by Marshall prior to 1801 and also the publication of a sequel, entitled *The mother’s grammar* soon after publication. These two works appear to have been treated differently from “Mrs Teachwell’s” works” and Lady Ellenor appears not to have transferred the copyrights to Marshall. These were the only ones of her works to be described on their title pages as having been published ‘for the author’, and later editions were published by John Harris rather than Marshall. This may have been why they were not listed in his catalogues.

⁹² *A short history of insects, (extracted from works of credit) designed as an introduction to the study of that branch of natural history, and as a pocket companion to those who visit the Leverian Museum*, Norwich: Printed and sold by Stevenson and Matchett, 1796. The Cotsen collection contains a copy with hand coloured illustrations.

⁹³ See Brian Alderson, ‘Miniature libraries for the young’, *The Private Library*, Spring 1983, 3-38.

The novelist George Borrow painted a brief sketch of Lady Ellenor as a widow at Dereham during the first decade of the nineteenth century, living in the town’s “one half-aristocratic mansion”, describing her as:

Lady Bountiful - she, the generous and kind, who loved to visit the sick, leaning on her gold-headed cane, whilst the sleek old footman walked at a respectful distance behind.⁹⁴

Yet, however well meant, many of her attempts were ultimately misplaced as she vainly sought to counter the economic forces of the Industrial Revolution.

LADY FENN REINVENTS HERSELF AS MRS. LOVECHILD

Lady Ellenor appears to have begun collaborating with Elizabeth, the widow of the children’s publisher Francis Newbery of St Paul’s churchyard, London, in 1797 using the pseudonym “Mrs Lovechild”. In this year Newbery published *The infant’s friend*, parts 1 and 2, the first of which contained a spelling book, and the second reading lessons. A third part was published in 1799. As with *Cobwebs to catch flies*, and *The art of teaching in sport*, these two works were originally intended to be used in conjunction with one of her teaching schemes, (probably *The infant’s delight*) but only copies of the books have survived.⁹⁵

The following year (1798) saw the final break between Lady Ellenor and her original publisher which coincides with John Marshall’s well known dispute with another of his authors, Hannah More, over what she regarded as his excessive profits from the publication of the Cheap Repository Tracts.⁹⁶ These two events may well have been related.⁹⁷ In any event, Lady Fenn transferred her new publications to a new publisher, and forgot about “Mrs Teachwell”. Marshall continued to publish new editions of the most successful of her existing titles and market them under their original name. He also appears to have engaged in some spoiling

⁹⁴ George Borrow, *Lavengro*, (P. Davies, 1926), 17.

⁹⁵ *The infant’s friend, part I. Spelling book, and part II. Reading lessons*, By Mrs. Lovechild. (London: E. Newbery. 1797), Roscoe, *John Newbery and his successors*, J117 and J118. The third part was advertised in Mrs Trimmer’s *Silver Thimble*, (1799), as printed for E. Newbery, but no copies are known (Roscoe J119). See also Ellenor Fenn’s *The Friend of mothers* (London, 1799), p.10. It was also reviewed in *Young Gentleman and Lady’s Magazine*, II, 1797, 53. *The infant’s delight* was advertised by Newbery as “a Specimen of Cuts in a Superior Stile for Children; with a Book containing their Names, as easy reading Lessons; and an Address to Mothers: in an engraved case. – Price 1s. 6d”. A few copies of *the Infant’s friend*, (parts 1 and 2) were printed on fine paper, and neatly bound in red, price 1s and 1s 6d (Charles Welsh, *A bookseller of the last century*, (London: Griffith, Farran, Okeden and Welsh, 1885), 218.

⁹⁶ See G. H. Spinney, ‘Cheap Repository Tracts: Hazard and Marshall edition’, *The Library. Transactions of the Bibliographical Society*, XX. (1939/40), 295-340.

⁹⁷ B.S. Frere (p.81) quotes a letter from Hannah More to Ellenor Fenn complaining about Marshall’s behaviour.

tactics with respect to her later publications: thus after Elizabeth Newbery published two new teaching schemes by Lady Fenn, entitled *The infant’s delight*, and *The infant’s path strewn with flowers*, (the latter dealing with natural history), Marshall produced two small publications of his own, with exactly the same titles.⁹⁸ Elizabeth Newbery retaliated in 1799 by publishing a French language version of Marshall’s bestseller, *Cobwebs to catch flies*.⁹⁹

The years 1798 and 1799 seem to have been particularly fruitful period for a newly invigorated Lady Fenn, with a number of entirely new books and schemes for teaching children produced. Her new publisher also engaged in an advertising campaign using the new pseudonym, announcing ‘A series of books for teaching by “Mrs Lovechild”’ or ‘Schemes for Teaching under the idea of amusement’, both in copies of her own works and those of other writers. The success of the *Child’s grammar* and *The Mother’s grammar* encouraged her to produce further grammatical works, *Parsing lessons for young children* and *Parsing lessons for elder pupils*¹⁰⁰. Likewise *A miscellany in prose and verse, for young persons, on a Sunday*,¹⁰¹ appears to have been intended for her own and other Sunday schools and was distributed by both Richard Bacon in Norwich, and Elizabeth Newbery in London.

In 1799 Lady Ellenor wrote and Elizabeth Newbery published two works setting out her ideas and philosophies of education. *Some hints to young women, engaged in rearing infants, or educating children, either in private families, or schools*, largely consisted of extracts from other authors, sometimes acknowledged, sometimes not so.¹⁰² Of more interest was *The friend of mothers*, which attempted to set out many of her new ideas and plans and served as a prospectus for further teaching schemes, serving a similar function to “Mrs Teachwell’s” *Art of teaching in sport*.

⁹⁸ Unfortunately the two schemes are only known through advertisements in other works, but copies of Marshall’s two publications have survived.

⁹⁹ *Toiles d’araignees pour attraper les mouches*, (London: E. Newbery, 1799), Roscoe J129.

¹⁰⁰ *Parsing lessons for young children*, and *Parsing lessons for elder pupil: resolved into their elements, for the assistance of parents and teachers*. (London: printed for E. Newbery, 1798). Roscoe J 122 and J123.

¹⁰¹ *A miscellany in prose and verse, for young persons, on a Sunday*, [Norwich?]: Sold by [Richard] Bacon Norwich; and by Mrs. Newbery, London, [1798?].

¹⁰² *Some hints to young women, engaged in rearing infants, or educating children, either in private families, or schools*, (London: printed for E. Newbery, 1799). Her rationale for the publication was set in the preface “To Young Women”.

This little volume is designed as a prelude to a set of Toys for the purpose of Teaching in Sport: it is intended at once to explain the manner of using those Toys, and to hint to young Mothers how they amuse and instruct their little ones on the same plan, even without such an apparatus. The writer hopes soon to provide a Box for the purpose of teaching the Rudiments of Language in a sportive manner, on a plan the most simple and the least expensive possible: this will be called a Spelling Box. The difficulty of getting very diminutive cuts neatly executed, has hitherto retarded the appearance of this beginning of her scheme: she announces with pleasure, that the continuation mentioned in page 24) is in the hands of an engraver: it is to be on the same plan as the Infant’s delight.¹⁰³

Among Lady Fenn’s new teaching schemes announced by Elizabeth Newbery in 1799, were *Grammatical amusements in a box*, and *The figure scheme, or figures rendered pleasant to children in a bag*, (neither of which has survived). However, as mentioned in *The friend of mothers*, several of Ellenor’s plans required the use of suitable illustrations at a reasonable price, but all of the works of “Mrs Lovechild” published by Elizabeth Newbery were un-illustrated. This may explain why she undertook yet another collaboration, this time with the firm of Darton and Harvey, whilst simultaneously retaining her links with Elizabeth Newbery.

Around 1799 or 1800 Darton and Harvey produced the first edition *Mrs. Lovechild's book of three hundred and thirty-six cuts*, which consisted of relief illustrations of everyday objects based on sheets of lottery tickets.¹⁰⁴ They were produced without any accompanying text other than their labels and printed on one side of the paper only. These were also made available already cut up as “Douceurs in a box”. In this format they were accompanied by a separate small two volume work entitled *The mother’s remarks on a set of cuts for children*, which described them. Writing in ‘An address to mothers’, at the beginning of this work, Ellenor says:

The first intention of these cuts was merely to supply douceurs for those children who were entering on the study of arithmetic; in order to supply gifts as rewards, &c.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ *The friend of mothers: designed to assist them in their attempts to instil the rudiments of language and arithmetic*, (London: Printed for E. Newbery. 1799).

¹⁰⁴ For the use of lottery tickets in teaching see Barry McKay ‘John Atkinson’s “Lottery” Book of 1809: John Locke’s Theory of Education comes to Warrington’ in, *The moving market: continuity and change in the book trade*, (Delaware, Oak Knoll, 2001), 127-144, and Andrea Immel, ‘Frederick Lock’s Scrapbook: Patterns in the Pictures and Writing in the Margins’, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, 29.1 (2004) 65-85.

¹⁰⁵ *The mother’s remarks on a set of cuts for children*. (London: Printed for Darton and Harvey, by S. Couchman, 1799). 2 v. 16cm. 15.3 x 9.5 cm. Pp. X + 88; 78. Lawrence Darton, *Dartons: an annotated check-list of children’s books, games and educational aids, issued by two publishing houses 1787-1876*, (British Library/Oak Knoll Press, 2004), G330.

An abridged collection of these illustrations was published in 1824 by the same publishers after Lady Fenn’s death as *Mrs. Lovechild's book of two hundred and sixteen cuts* and later as the *Good child's picture book*.¹⁰⁶

The firm of Darton and Harvey published a number of other small illustrated works by “Mrs Lovechild” during the first decade of the nineteenth century, many of which have failed to survive. These include: *A short description of two sets of alphabetical cuts of birds* (1803), *A short history of reptiles* (1803), and *A short history of bees* (c.1804).¹⁰⁷ Other titles published by Lady Fenn during this period were collaborations between Darton and Harvey and her final publisher John Harris, and so are dealt with later.

In 1801/2 Elizabeth Newbery was considering retiring from business and so Ellenor looked around for a new publisher for a second edition of her *Some hints to young women, engaged in rearing infants, or educating children*. Her reputation was now such that she was approached by the publisher Benjamin Tabart, founder of ‘Tabart’s Juvenile & School Library’; and her response is preserved in a most interesting letter preserved in the Osborne Collection in Toronto. In this letter she specifies her conditions stating unequivocally that she was anxious not to incur financial engagements with tradesmen, either as a creditor or debtor

You are welcome to do the Hints on your own account: and I will accept the books which I have kept if you wish it. If so you will acknowledge by letter. I wish to have a clear account, and to guard against mistakes in case of death I should be sorry to have book accounts appear as debts.¹⁰⁸

In the event the collaboration came to nothing, due to Tabart’s bankruptcy, and the work in question was subsequently published by Elizabeth Newbery’s successor John Harris under the new title of *Hints to young women who are engaged in education*.¹⁰⁹

Elizabeth Newbery sold her business to John Harris 1802, and he quickly established a good working relationship with Lady Ellenor, which was to continue for the remainder of her life. Not only did he set about printing new editions of many of the works of “Mrs Lovechild” which had been published by his predecessor, but also took over new editions of *The child's Grammar*,

¹⁰⁶ Dartons G329, and G393).

¹⁰⁷ Dartons, G331-3 (all reprinted in 1805).

¹⁰⁸ Manuscript in the Osborne Library, Toronto Public Library.

¹⁰⁹ *Hints to young Women who are engaged in Education*, No copies are now known, but the work was advertised by Harris in an edition of *The mother's grammar*, 1804.

and *The mother’s grammar* from Marshall, and encouraged her to publish new titles. He also sought new ways of marketing her works with advertisements headed “Mrs. Lovechild’s Attempt to make the Road to Knowledge Plain and Easy”, or “Mrs Lovechild’s” Series of Grammatical Knowledge”

In 1805 Harris published several works in collaboration with Darton Harvey, including *The family miscellany*, another of her compilations in prose and verse; “designed to supply lessons for children of various ages”.¹¹⁰ This was reviewed in the *Guardian of Education*, as having been compiled “with judgment”, although the reviewer disapproved of a piece about the arrival of a new baby brother in the family.¹¹¹ Likewise, both publishers were responsible for *A systematical arrangement of the animal kingdom*, in the same year.¹¹² This work was also reviewed by the *Guardian of Education*, in which it was noted with approval that the author

stresses the importance of cultivating a taste for natural history in sons, particularly those who are destined to visit foreign lands, and peculiarly officers, in their future residence in various climes, where such harmless relaxation for their hours of leisure may save them from the paths of vice and ruin.¹¹³

John Harris also produced several new teaching schemes by Lady Ellenor, including *The pronouncing scheme*, *Sportive exercises in grammar*, and *A spelling box*, all of which were advertised about 1805, but have apparently failed to survive.¹¹⁴ There were also two sets of educational cards for performing conjuring tricks, by Lady Fenn. *A secret worth knowing* was described as “a pack of curious cards” with “instructive lessons conveyed to the mind of youth by means of an easy trick”, and *Friendly whispers for youth of both sexes*, which was conceived

¹¹⁰ *The family miscellany, in prose and verse; designed to supply lessons for children of various ages*, (London: Printed for John Harris; Darton and Harvey, By W. Darton and J. & J. Harvey, 1805), reprinted in 1809. See Marjorie Moon, *John Harris’s books for youth 1801-1843*, (Five Owls Press, 1976), 260, and *Dartons* G326.

¹¹¹ *Guardian of Education*, December. 1805, p.56.

¹¹² *A systematical arrangement of the animal kingdom; designed to supply a pocket volume for those who visit museums, and to enable ladies to introduce their children to the study of that branch of natural history*. (Printed and sold by Darton and Harvey 1805. Reprinted 1806. *Dartons* G335.

¹¹³ *Guardian of Education*, 4 1805, 171-2

¹¹⁴ Moon 1020, 1023 and 1022. A copy of a 40 page work entitled *The teacher’s assistant, in the art of teaching grammar in sport*. (London, J. Harris, 1809) and which appears to have been a component part of the second of these schemes survives in the Cotsen Library (Cotsen English 18 Harris 34083) bound with a copy of *The mother’s grammar*, 1804, with the following notes from the ‘Advertisement’, “It may be presumed, that the purchaser of this Box approves of Teaching in Sport; a favourite method with the contriver, who has found, by experience, that much may be taught by extra lessons given in a sportive manner, as an indulgence; and that what is communicated in this pleasant way, is retained; because it is connected with delight”.

on a similar plan.¹¹⁵ Lady Ellenor also continued to publish new titles with Harris, which have not survived including *Sunday improvements for children*, (1807)¹¹⁶ and *Short sermons for children*, (1808).¹¹⁷

During her later years she was said to be constantly fretting about her life, and her inability to make any impact on the poverty around her. B.S. Frere quotes a letter from her aged Aunt Ellenor Frere to her nephew:

Lady Fenn’s last may justly be called the widow’s lamentations, - her great expenses, her disabilities to relieve the distress of the poor, - cannot sell her books, sacks, boxes, and pincushions hang in hand.¹¹⁸

She died on 1 November 1813, and was buried alongside her husband, in the Frere family vault in Finningham Church in Suffolk. Unusually for a female author, she received an obituary in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, describing her as a woman “whose life has been spent in doing good”.¹¹⁹ Thus the identity of “Mrs Teachwell” and “Mrs Lovechild” at last became common knowledge.

EPILOGUE

Lady Ellenor’s popularity was at its height during the first decade of the nineteenth century, when she was constantly writing and publishing new works as “Mrs Lovechild”, whilst simultaneously witnessing new editions of many of the works of “Mrs Teachwell”. Shortly after her death John Marshall published new editions of several of her works, together with one new title *Baby’s Busy hours, by the late Lady Fenn*, (which was taken from her *Fables in Monosyllables*).¹²⁰ Darton and Harvey also published two new titles posthumously: *The little vocabulary*, and a companion volume *Easy reading adapted to the capacities of children*

¹¹⁵ Moon 1019 and 1021. One of these card tricks was described in Charles Welsh, ‘A forgotten primer and its author’, p.194, and another is referred to in an undated letter from Lady Fenn to a Mrs Hancock (Yale University Osborn Files 5197).

¹¹⁶ Moon 274.

¹¹⁷ Moon 272. It was advertised by Harris between 1808 and 1816.

¹¹⁸ Frere, p.83

¹¹⁹ *The Gentleman’s Magazine*., 88 (1813), pt. ii 508).

¹²⁰ *Baby’s Busy hours: Six Monosyllable Fables*. (London: Marshall, c.1814). Copy at UCLA.

(1814).¹²¹ John Harris’s editions of the *Child’s grammar* were still selling 10,000 copies per year by 1816, and more than 200,000 had been sold by 1830.¹²² Sometime during the 1820s Harris also published the first edition of an entirely new illustrated work by her entitled *Infantile knowledge* (later re-titled *Infantine knowledge*), which was to enjoy some popularity during the first half of the nineteenth century.¹²³ This was subtitled “a spelling book on a popular plan”, but contained reading lessons progressing from simple sentences to longer passages with words of two syllables, all used to convey a moral message. The work also included sections on “Select poetry”, “Historical sketches of the kings of England”, “Dr Watts’ First catechism”, and “Directions for an agreeable behaviour and polite address”. It appears to have been compiled from her unpublished notes. Harris had published six editions by 1842, and a seventh appeared in 1850 published by Grant and Griffith.¹²⁴

In the meanwhile, *The Mother’s grammar* had reached twenty-two editions by 1849¹²⁵ and *The child’s grammar* reached fifty editions during the 1860s.¹²⁶ *Cobwebs to catch Flies* never went out of print, and was reprinted at regular intervals until the mid-1860s. Baldwin, Cradock, & Joy published new editions or impressions until 1841, thereafter it was published by Darton & Co (1842-1852) and the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge (1844-60). In the 1870s, it was published by Routledge, in 1885 by Lockwood, and the last known edition was by Frederick Warne and Co. in 1894. The work had retained its popularity for more than one hundred and ten years after its first appearance. Lady Ellenor’s continuing popularity also gave rise to a host of nineteenth century imitators including “Sarah Teachwell”, “Timothy Teachwell”, “Dame Teachwell”, “Louisa Lovechild”, “Solomon Lovechild”, “Papa Lovechild”, “Mr Lovechild”, as well as several other unrelated “Mrs Lovechild’s” in Britain and the

¹²¹ *The little vocabulary, intended as an introduction to any of the larger spelling-books, and particularly designed to assist mothers in the instruction of their young children.* (London W. Darton, 1814), and *Easy reading: adapted to the capacities of children from five to seven years old: designed to advance them by natural and easy gradations to the perusal of larger works* (London: W. Darton, 1814), Dartons H585, and H584.

¹²² John Harris, in an advertisement in 1816, wrote: “This is certainly the best introduction to English grammar ever printed; and, as a proof of its excellence, the publisher can assure the public that ten thousand are sold annually.” The statement of 200,000 sold appeared on the title page of the 34th edition see Moon, 259.

¹²³ Moon 264. The date of publication of the first edition is not known. A second edition (improved, by Thomas Smith) entitled *Infantine knowledge: a spelling book on a popular plan,* was published by Harris circa 1828.

¹²⁴ *Infantine knowledge*: 7th ed. (London : Grant and Griffith, 1850).

¹²⁵ Listed in Alibone S.A. *A critical dictionary of English literature and British and American authors ...* 3 vols. London 1858-70.

U.S.A.¹²⁷ *A New cobwebs to catch little flies* was also published by the Religious Tract Society, between 1833 and 1839.

There is little doubt that Ellenor Fenn was happily married,¹²⁸ but the frequent references to the role and importance of mothers in so many of her publications, is perhaps an indication that she was unfulfilled in her childless state. Her early career as “Mrs Teachwell” was perhaps an attempt to channel her many ideas and talents in respect of child rearing and elementary education in some useful way. The re-invention of herself as “Mrs Lovechild” following the death of her husband, and the broadening of her educational and philanthropic interests at this time, may be seen as part of her emancipation from the inevitable restrictions of an albeit happy marriage. As “Mrs Teachwell”, she had stood by whilst John Marshall made a comfortable profit from the publication of her works. However, “Mrs Lovechild” now needed funds to pursue her various philanthropic endeavours, and was able to exert more control over her published output than she ever could before. “Mrs Teachwell’s” works were often charming and innovative, but expensively produced for an essentially middle class audience. That is the reason why a relatively high proportion of them have survived. “Mrs Lovechild’s” works, on the other hand, were more practical and relevant to a wider audience, cheaper to produce, and more focussed on immediate educational needs. This perhaps explains why so many of her titles from her later years are now known only from advertisements.

David Stoker

February 2007.

¹²⁶ A copy of the 50th edition is in the Columbia Teachers College Library

¹²⁷ Unfortunately works by several of these authors have been attributed to Lady Ellenor in library catalogues and bibliographies, despite the fact that they are often stylistically quite different from her works and contain anachronistic information.

¹²⁸ There are two surviving letters from Ellenor to her husband, written in 1791 whilst he was at Thetford on business, which display a degree of affection between them (N.R.O., Colman MS COL 8/104/36).

Suggested list of illustrations

Just a few ideas

1. Ellenor Fenn There is a surviving portrait of Ellenor reproduced in a book but it is poorly reproduced and I am not sure about the copyright

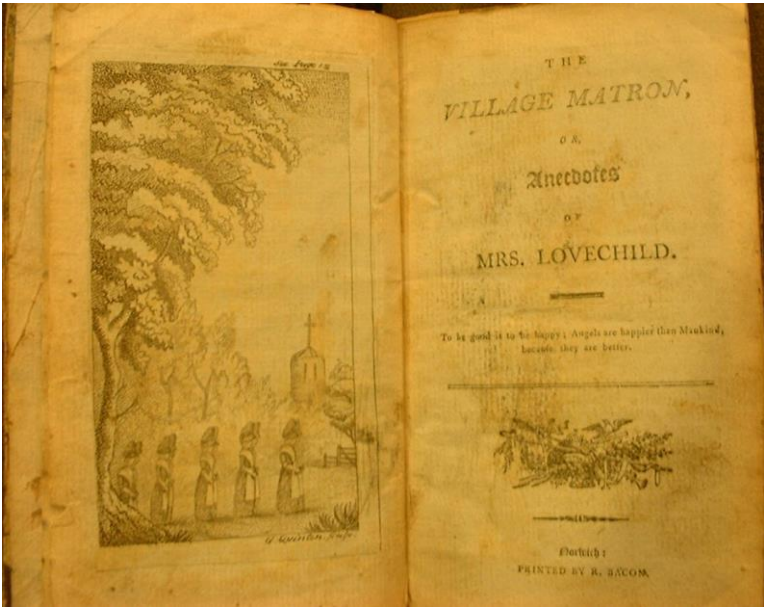


2. Hill House East Dereham, where she lived (reasonable quality photo - my copyright)



3. A hundred years of editions of *Cobwebs to Catch flies* photo from: Osborne Collection Toronto



<p>4. Ellenor’s poor scholars – from the <i>Village Matron</i> (you have a better quality copy than this in Cotsen)</p>	
<p>5. Possibly a comparison of illustrations between different editions of <i>Cobwebs</i> (Cotsen has a good range)</p>	
<p>5. Cotsen copy of <i>Short history of insects</i> has a beautifully coloured frontispiece</p>	
<p>6. Cotsen copy of <i>A spelling book</i> has a nice frontispiece showing a mother teaching son to spell with a book whilst her daughter plays with one of her teaching schemes</p>	
<p>7. Cotsen copy of <i>A set of toys</i></p>	
<p>8. The Cotsen copy of <i>The fairy spectator</i> has a nice frontispiece.</p>	
<p>9. Cotsen has several illustrated copies of <i>The rational dame</i></p>	